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**TITLE:**

**ADVANCE FORCE OPERATIONS:**

**THE MIDDLEWEIGHT FORCE'S ESSENTIAL ROLE IN JOINT OPERATIONS**

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT  
OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF  
MASTER OF MILITARY STUDIES

**AUTHOR:**

**MAJOR IAN C. FLETCHER, USMC**

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Mentor and Oral Defense Committee Member: Douglas E. Stremmel

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 18 April 2013

Oral Defense Committee Member: Paul D. Gress

Approved: [Signature]

Date: 19 April 2013

## *Executive Summary*

**Title:** Advance Force Operations: The Middleweight Force's Essential Role in the Future Fight

**Author:** Major Ian C. Fletcher, USMC

**Thesis:** The concept of Advance Force Operations (AFO) has evolved beyond the Marine Corps current capabilities and the Marine Corps is at risk of becoming dependent on Special Operations Forces (SOF) to gain access into the operating environment.

**Discussion:** The Marine Corps is required operate seamlessly across the spectrum of conflict to reinforce persistent or crisis operations through the conduct of specialized and conventional operations. This requirement is captured within the Marine Corps "Middleweight Force" concept ; however, changes regarding Advance Force Operations have increased the risk of the Marine Corps not meeting its obligation as the nation's "middle weight force" to bridge the void between SOF and the General Purpose Force (GPF).

Advance Force Operations (AFO) are conducted to enable the transition from pre-crisis activities (PCA) to crisis response. AFO is a military concept that directly contributes to successful contingency operations. An integrated approach to the full range of AFO activities during peacetime and pre-crisis deployments is essential for mission success and is in line with the 2012 Capstone Concept of Joint Operations (CCJO).

This paper argues that the concept of AFO has evolved beyond the Marine Corps current capabilities. It will review AFO historical definitions and examples ("old concept") and using this foundation, it explains why older concepts are no longer valid. Furthermore, it describes the new concept and the factors that have contributed to the Marine Corps inability to meet its traditional assured access and forcible entry requirements. It will conclude with an explanation on why the Marine Corps is poorly postured to operate within the new AFO paradigm, and offers recommendations to allow the Marine Corps to be a credible and relevant partner in AFO.

There are several challenges to improvising and implementing a Joint concept of Advance Force Operations (J-AFO). First, joint and service doctrines are not aligned. Second, AFO organizations and capabilities remain "ad hoc" within the Marine Corps. Finally, AFO capabilities are resource intensive and require significant focus to ensure the capabilities meet service and joint requirements.

**Conclusion:** The Marine Corps can close the capability gap with SOF and codify interoperability with SOF but Service leadership will have to determine if it wants to invest fully in regaining an AFO capability. If so, the Marine Corps will have to commit to executing the ACWG, EGR CBA and ISR Study recommendations. Regardless of the solution selected, the Marine Corps will have to invest in increasing the training and readiness standards of its expeditionary forces. If the Marine Corps invests in AFO to the full measure, it then will be able to enable the Joint Force, in partnership with SOF, to enter a crisis to the greatest advantage possible.

DISCLAIMER

THE OPINIONS AND CONCLUSIONS EXPRESSED HEREIN ARE THOSE OF THE INDIVIDUAL STUDENT AUTHOR AND DO NOT NECESSARILY REPRESENT THE VIEWS OF EITHER THE MARINE CORPS COMMAND AND STAFF COLLEGE OR ANY OTHER GOVERNMENTAL AGENCY. REFERENCES TO THIS STUDY SHOULD INCLUDE THE FOREGOING STATEMENT.

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## *Preface*

I began this project with the intent of explaining why the Joint Force appeared to be underutilizing the Marine Corps as the nation's 911 force. This question came from my experiences over the past three years within HQMC Plans, Policies and Operations and concerns raised by many Marines I have worked with.

I found that the Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) regard the Marine Corps as incapable of working with Special Operations forces in crisis response. There is a general belief that Special Operations Forces have replaced Marine Infantry and Reconnaissance units during all offensive and shaping operations outside of areas of declared armed conflict. As a Marine, I do not believe this is an acceptable trend. Therefore, I narrowed my focus down to understanding the concept of AFO to determine what drives the Marine Corps to produce SOF-like capabilities. Are these capabilities essential to support the "Middleweight force" concept which aims at "bridging the gap" between the General Purpose Force and SOF. This study does not, by any means, answer all the questions associated with the Advance Force Operations role of the Marine Corps but attempts to begin the conversation.

My sincere appreciation is directed to Dr. Douglas Streusand, LtCol Jeffery Tlapa, LtCol Jason Schmidt, LtCol Sean Braziel and Maj Thomas "Rusty" Dun for their support and motivation during this process. Additional, thanks goes to Col Frank Donovan and Col Mark Desens for their candid comments regarding MEU command and current operations.

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## **Introduction**

The Marine Corps brands itself as America's "middleweight force," a force scalable and adaptive enough to fill the void in the Nation's defense structure between light Special Operations Forces (SOF) and heavier General Purpose Forces (GPF).<sup>1</sup> The "middleweight force" is how the Marine Corps describes its place in the nation's force structure; it is the concept that enables the Marine Corps to develop forces capable of transitioning from sustained engagement to crisis response, in other words, it is the ability to "fight up a weight class or fight down."<sup>2</sup> In effect the Marine Corps, "bridges the seam in [the] Nation's defense between heavy conventional and special operations forces (SOF)... [it] is light enough to arrive rapidly at the scene of a crisis, but heavy enough to carry the day and sustain itself upon arrival."<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless, the Marine Corps is at risk of being unable to meet this obligation and bridge the void between SOF and the GPF. The Marine Air-Ground Task Force's (MAGTF) lacks the organic Advanced Force Operations capability to support the Joint Force's "new" concepts of AFO, which contain all actions that enable the Joint Force to transition seamlessly from pre-crisis activities<sup>4</sup> to crisis operations.<sup>5</sup> Marine Corps doctrine defines AFO as clandestine reconnaissance and surveillance (R&S); joint reception, staging, onward movement, and integration of forces (JRSOI); information operations; terminal guidance; and limited direct action operations.<sup>6</sup> To the Marine Corps, AFO are core MAGTF tasks conducted overtly or clandestinely in advance of the introduction of the main military force to shape the operational environment in support of the Joint Force Commander (JFC).<sup>7</sup> The Marine Corps has a distinguished history of conducting AFO, but the rise of United States Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) compounded by the Service's neglect of AFO capabilities has left it incapable of acting as the nation's middleweight force.

This paper argues that AFO are an essential part of expeditionary operations but the concept of AFO has evolved beyond the Marine Corps current concepts and capabilities. Therefore, the Marine Corps is at risk of becoming dependent on Special Operations Forces (SOF) to gain access into the operating environment. As a result, the Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) no longer calls upon the Marine Corps to respond first to emergent crises.<sup>8</sup> This paper will review AFO historical definitions and examples (“old concept”). Using this foundation, it will explain why older concepts are no longer valid; and describes the new concept and the factors that contribute to the Marine Corps’ inability to meet its core assured access and forcible entry requirements. It will conclude with an explanation of why the Marine Corps remains poorly postured to operate within the new AFO paradigm, and offers recommendations to enable the Marine Corps to perform AFO and truly serve as the Nation’s middleweight/911 force.

This paper will not argue the efficacy of Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOCC) or existing SOF AFO entities; rather that SOF AFO capabilities are additive to MAGTF capabilities as SOF support is not always reliably available to the MAGTF. One potential way ahead that will be explored is to better integrate SOF with MAGTF AFO elements and employ these capabilities in tandem to support the nation’s objectives. By addressing the gap between the Marine Corps and SOF AFO capabilities, the Marine Corps will ensure its position as the nation’s 911 force, the force that is “most ready when the nation is least ready.” But, to accomplish this requirement, the Marine Corps must be ready to set the conditions for follow-on operations across the range of military operations (ROMO).

### Context



The challenges of today's complex global and fiscal environment prompted senior Marine Corps leadership to convene the Amphibious Capabilities Working Group (ACWG) in the spring of 2012.<sup>9</sup> The purpose of the ACWG was to "assess the challenges and opportunities from amphibious operations within the context of 21st century naval and joint warfighting." This paper expounds upon the Amphibious Capabilities Working Group's (ACWG) final report titled "Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century" by addressing the obstacles facing Marine Forces and SOF during the transition from pre-crisis activities to combat operations.<sup>10</sup>

The exploration of this topic is timely as the Marine Corps is currently reorienting to meet future operating requirements. The drive to integrate Marine and SOF capabilities is a result of the Joint Force's goal to "maintain and enhance general purpose force and special operating force integration"<sup>11</sup> while developing a force that is "smaller and leaner, but agile, flexible, ready and technologically advanced"<sup>12</sup> enough to meet the challenges of the future. The *2012 Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO): Joint Force 2020* expresses the Joint Force's desire in detail and serves to support the findings of the ACWG. The 2012 CCJO outlines the Chairman, Joint Chief of Staff's (CCJS) vision to guide the transition of the joint force "from a decade of war" to meet the requirements laid out in the 2010 National Security Strategy.<sup>13</sup> The CCJO reinforces that the "strength of [the] Joint Force has always been its ability to combine unique Service capabilities to project decisive military force," and challenges the services to better "integrate capabilities fluidly across domains, echelons, geographic boundaries and organizational affiliations." To achieve this goal, the CCJO outlines a conceptual framework titled: Globally Integrated Operations, to inform the services what the future Joint Force should be capable of by 2020.<sup>14</sup>

Captured within the CCJO is the Joint Force's goal to achieve "better integration to improve cross-domain synergy" of forward deployed forces in order to support Joint Operational Access and Forcible entry.<sup>15</sup> SOF activities directly support access assurance and forcible entry, two core tasks for the Marine Corps.<sup>16</sup> To support this idea, the ACWG identified how the "integration of Marine multi-capable capacity with SOF authorities and specialized skills [would] provide for an efficient and effective means to project influence and power across a broad range of missions." In effect, by combining the unique and complementary capabilities of both Marine Forces and SOF, the Joint Force commander will possess a responsive, agile, and precise capability to rapidly respond to emergent threats.<sup>17</sup>

The ACWG asserts that if the obstacles preventing integration are overcome then, in theory, the Marine Corps and SOF will be able to provide "a combined SOF-Marine team [to] national decision makers and Geographic Combatant Commanders (GCC) [a number of] scalable options."<sup>18</sup> These options "leverage" Marine mobility (strategic, operational and tactical), maneuver, ISR, sustainment, C2, force protection and fires" and SOF's "specialized skill sets, precision effects and a global steady-state security presence." The challenge is that though the Marine Corps possesses many "SOF-like" AFO capabilities, the Joint Force Commander does not recognize these capabilities as an equivalent to SOF. Additionally, the Marine Corps develops these "SOF-like" capabilities utilizing an AFO concept that fails to capture the complete scope of AFO envisioned by the Joint Force Command. Without sufficient understanding of the Marine forces capabilities, the GCC staffs have turned to SOF to satisfy the full measure of AFO requirements, forcing the Marine Corps to rely solely on SOF to enable MAGTF operations.

As the Marine Corps “returns to its amphibious roots”<sup>19</sup> a number of officers refer to the MEU(SOC) program in the 1990s as a measure of success and the model the Marine Corps should utilize to reform its expeditionary capabilities. Their reference to “past successes” highlights a lack of historical awareness. The next section provides a detailed history of AFO to inform why these operations are essential and identifies that point where the definitions between the Marine Corps and SOCOM diverged leading to the current gaps between the service and Joint Force.

## **Chapter 1: AFO Historical Definitions and Examples**

### **The Beginnings: 1900-1945**

Many credit Major Earl Ellis as the father of AFO and naval reconnaissance. While working with the Office of Naval Intelligence he drafted a report titled *Advance Base Operations in Micronesia*, which provided a detailed analysis of Japan and its expanding capabilities. Ellis’ assessment indicated that Japan was a rising world power and a threat to the United States. He supported his finding through a detailed discussion of “the sea, air and climate, land types, native populations, economic conditions, and the enemy”<sup>20</sup> to support this findings. Ellis “concluded with an outline of [US] strategy of seizing key islands as bases to project our forces, a discussion of materiel requirements such as planes capable of dropping torpedoes in the water.”<sup>21</sup> However, Ellis understood the controversial nature of this report, so Ellis elected to support his finding through a detailed reconnaissance of the south pacific between 1921 and 1922. His actions would become the foundation of war plan ORANGE. Analysis of the character of Ellis activities reveals that his activities were pre-crisis in character and therefore better associated with today’s concept of Preparation of the Environment (PE)<sup>22</sup> operations than AFO.<sup>23</sup>

The concept of naval AFO was first introduced in 1906 when Major Dion Williams, USMC, began experimenting and writing the initial documents for amphibious reconnaissance. His work, *Naval Reconnaissance, Instructions for the Reconnaissance of Bays, Harbors, and Adjacent Country*,<sup>24</sup> captures the scope and significance of gathering timely information in support of naval landings. Major Williams divided his operational construct into naval<sup>25</sup> and military<sup>26</sup> reconnaissance and shaping activities. He placed great importance on conducting reconnaissance long before hostilities arise to guide advance planning, and he advocated for continuing reconnaissance through detailed planning and final preparations. Major Williams' approach created a framework that would allow commanders to verify the soundness of their plans and concepts prior to execution.<sup>27</sup> Major Williams' concluded that:

The object of the naval reconnaissance of any given locality is to acquire all of the information concerning the sea, land, air, and material resources of that locality, with a view to its use by the Navy in peace and war, and to record this information that it may be most readily available for: the preparation of plans for the occupation of the locality as a temporary or permanent naval base... ;the preparation of plans for the sea and land defense of the locality when used as such a base; or the preparation of plans for the attack of the locality by sea and land should it be in possession of an enemy.<sup>28</sup>

Major Williams' 17 years of experimentation and concept development were captured in the 1938 publication of FTP 167 *Landing Operations Doctrine*. Detailed in FMFRP 21-12 *Aarugha*, FTP 167 provided:

The amphibious doctrine for World War II and in its discussion of reconnaissance mentions the possible consideration of units of advance or reconnaissance forces to conduct preliminary operations as well as landing parties. The advisability of having an actual human observation vice "machine" observation was emphasized since information obtained by surface craft, submarine, aerial observation and photography, might be unable to disclose if emplacements were manned or reveal carefully camouflaged machinegun positions: "Against an alert enemy the attacker will have to depend upon landing parties to gain information regarding the enemy's strength and dispositions on shore. The landing parties may consist of agents, patrols, or reconnaissance in force."<sup>29</sup>

Major Williams' work served as the basis of naval doctrine from the interwar period through World War II, but it also established the foundation of what would develop into the naval doctrine of AFO. His concepts of naval and military reconnaissance spawned the creation of the U.S. Navy Underwater Demolition Teams (UDT) and U.S. Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance units. Two of Major William's key observations underpinned their foundation:

1. That "only specially talented and experienced men should be assigned to this work, listing among the requisite qualities a thorough technical knowledge, a quick and energetic nature to ensure the work is accomplished without unnecessary delay, a sufficient resourcefulness to overcome unexpected obstacles, a reticence to ensure results are kept confidential, and above all, exactitude of work."<sup>30</sup>
2. That "lest a commander "show his hand" prematurely of interest in a target area, patrols were to land clandestinely, silently, and swiftly, preferably in fog or darkness, and were not to be supported by gunfire or aviation which might alert the enemy to their presence."<sup>31</sup>

The notion of specially selecting sailors and Marines to conduct clandestine operations in order to gain information regarding the weather, the enemy and the terrain, would become the a guiding principle for future AFO and challenge the naval forces to generate qualified AFO units from World War II until the mid-1980s. Many Marine Corps leaders, however, would develop a habit of rejecting the growth of an "elite within the elite."<sup>32</sup>

During World War II, Marine Recon and Navy UDTs worked together throughout the pacific campaign to identify landing beaches, scout enemy positions, and determine the locations of obstacles and impediments to the follow-on operations. Few realized the impact of Recon and UDT operations because many of these operations were highly classified therefore protected by greatest degree of stealth and security. When coordinated correctly, as in Tinian in 24 July 1944, these activities influenced operational commander's campaign design and the development of plans and force application. When coordinated incorrectly, or simply ignored, the lack of

reconnaissance activities led to disaster. For example, on 23 November 1943, the U.S. Marine landing on Tarawa Atoll struck offshore coral reefs and other obstacles in the surf; many Marines drowned or succumbed to enemy fire when their landing craft could not reach the beach.<sup>33</sup>

By the end of World War II, the importance of manned reconnaissance and advance force operations had been validated and naval doctrine was further refined based on the extensive experience gained by both the Navy and Marine Corps reconnaissance elements. Doctrinal changes captured the importance of detailed planning, coordination and preparation for reconnaissance operations. They included six principles of amphibious patrolling<sup>34</sup> which Marine forces continue to practice today and accepted that, while reconnaissance forces must operate with stealth, circumstances might require that they fight for information.

#### Naval Advance Force Operations: 1948 – 1983

The National Security Act of 1947 formally established the Joint Chiefs of Staff and the primary responsibilities of the US Marine Corps.<sup>35</sup> In 1948, the Marine Corps Board analyzed the responsibilities set forth in the 1947 NSA and identified a need for a raids and reconnaissance capability, which might include:

...the destruction of hostile weather and radar stations, destruction of enemy submarine base facilities, destruction of enemy air base facilities, destruction of critical enemy industrial plants or raw materials, reconnaissance of hostile: beaches and shore defenses, reconnaissance of air and submarine bases...<sup>36</sup>

The board recommended the establishment of a “Force Amphibious Reconnaissance Battalion,” but due to post WWII cutbacks, this recommendation was never realized.<sup>37</sup>

From 1948 to 1950, the Navy and Marine Corps continued to experiment through combined amphibious reconnaissance exercises that tested UDT and Marine Recon ability to utilize various specialized insertion methods that included submarines, diving and experimental parachuting. These exercises were successful in expanding the concept of naval AFO by including control of aircraft, naval fires and clandestine link up with agents. However, these exercises ended abruptly when, on 25 June 1950, the North Korean army invaded South Korea.

From the beginning of the Korean War, U.S. forces relied on Naval AFO to identify potential access points north of the Pusan perimeter. Marine Recon and UDTs conducted actions in support of *Operation Chromite*, the amphibious landing at Inchon. Additionally, UDT, as part of the Special Operations Group, successfully conducted demolition raids on railroad tunnels and bridges along the Korean coast.<sup>38</sup> In August 1950, Recon Marines conducted seven raids into North Korea from the USS Horace A. Bass (APD-124). In one such raid, “a combined force of sixteen Marines and twenty-five Navy Underwater Demolition Teams raided the Posung-Myon area destroying three tunnels and two railway bridges without losing one man.”<sup>39</sup> In October 1950, UDT frogmen supported mine-clearing operations in Wonsan Harbor by locating and marking mines for minesweepers. For the remainder of the war, UDTs conducted beach and river reconnaissance, infiltrated guerrillas behind the lines from sea, continued minesweeping operations, and participated in Operation Fishnet, which devastated the North Korean's fishing capability.

The decade following the Korean War was turbulent one for Marine Recon. Marine Corps leadership reduced, disbanded, and reformed recon units assigned to 1st and 2nd Marine Divisions at least three times during this period.<sup>40</sup> However, by 1952 the Commanding generals of both Fleet Marine Force Atlantic (FMFLANT) and Fleet Marine Force Pacific (FMFPAC)

recommended to then-commandant Gen. Clifton B. Cates, that the Marine Corps “must revisit the corps-level reconnaissance capability.”<sup>41</sup> From 1952 to 1956, the Marine Corps tested and reevaluated its requirement for force-level reconnaissance and finally established Force Recon in 1957 based on the lessons learned in WWII and Korea.<sup>42</sup> Concurrently, the Navy continued to develop the capabilities of its UDTs but in 1961, Arleigh Burke, Chief of Naval Operations, recommended the establishment of guerrilla and counter-guerrilla units, and thus the US Navy Sea, Air, Land (SEAL) Teams were born.

From the early 1960s, through the Vietnam War into the mid-1980s, the concepts governing Naval AFO did not change. Marine Recon was dedicated to supporting Marine Corps combat operations in zone, where they conducted “deep reconnaissance,”<sup>43</sup> and “Stingray/Key Hole”<sup>44</sup> operations. The UDTs supported the Amphibious Ready Groups operating in South Vietnam and Mekong delta while the newly formed SEALs began in Vietnam as advisors training the South Vietnamese in combat diving, demolitions, and guerrilla/anti-guerrilla tactics, later expanding their role to support CIA sponsored covert action associated with the “Phoenix Program.”<sup>45</sup> By all accounts, Marine Recon, the UDTs and SEALs performed well during the Vietnam War; however, their actions did not focus on supporting naval AFO.

Budget shortfalls forced the disbanding of 1st Force Recon Co by 1974. The Marine Corps continued its history of generating reconnaissance capability only to reduce it upon resourcing shortfalls.<sup>46</sup> The navy also reduced its forces in 1983, re-designating the UDTs as SEAL Delivery Vehicle Teams (SDVTs). The end of the UDTs signaled a turning point in the US Navy’s approach to AFO as only the SEALs remained to conduct naval pre-landing activities. From 1941 – 1983 Naval AFO was a function of Navy and Marine Corps units tasked specifically to support naval operations, but this would change in 1983, when Secretary of



Defense Caspar W. Weinberger, released a memorandum stating that the revitalization of special operations forces “must be pursued as a matter of national urgency.” From this point forward, the conduct of Naval AFO would become associated with the SEALs and “Special Operations.”<sup>47</sup>

#### Combined MEU Special Operations Capable (SOC) and SOCOM Operations: 1983 – 2000

The Weinberger memorandum prompted a Department of Defense (DoD) wide review of “Special Operations” capabilities. Then Commandant of the Marine Corps, General P.X. Kelley tasked LtGen Alfred Grey, to lead the Marine Corps’ effort. LtGen Grey published the study “Examination of Marine Corps Special Operations Enhancements” in 1984, highlighting the historical roles of Marine Raiders and Para-Marines in WWII special operations. However, the study did not identify Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance as a special operations capability.<sup>48</sup> In contrast, the Navy identified the SEALs as a special operations organization, an association that would begin to create a gap between Marine and Naval AFO capabilities. US Marine Corps History Division’s *DET ONE U.S. MARINE CORPS U.S. SPECIAL OPERATIONS COMMAND DETACHMENT, 2003-2006* details the reasons why the Marine Corps elected to remain outside of the newly formed Special Operations Command (SOCOM):

There were several reasons that the Marine Corps made this decision, but the essential point was that the Marine leadership saw the Corps as a general-purpose force with inherent special operations capabilities that had to remain flexible in structure and maritime in nature. To place Marine units under Special Operations Command, or even to place SOCOM itself under the Marines (as one member of Congress advocated), would have prevented the Corps from carrying out its primary mission for the national defense— providing maritime expeditionary forces in readiness. Behind this point was a general unease that an independent special operations command might not be a successful venture. The 1980 debacle at Desert One in Iran was a recent memory, and it left lingering mistrust among the armed services. Finally, Marines viewed themselves as “special” in their own right and did not see a need to attach themselves to any command in order to gain in name what they held in fact.<sup>49</sup>

The Department of Defense formally established SOCOM in 1987, the same year the Marine Corps began its MEU (SOC) program.<sup>50</sup> The MEU(SOC) program established a framework to standardize the generation of Marine Corps “special operations capabilities.” As a result, the units qualified to conduct AFO expanded beyond the Reconnaissance units to include the Special Operations Training Group (SOTG), which certified infantry battalions and MEU staffs. From 1987 to 1998, the Marine Corps and the Navy continued to deploy a combined Naval AFO capability aboard the MEU(SOC). Marine Recon, infantry and Navy SEALs trained to conduct naval and military reconnaissance and raids in advance of any amphibious operation. However, in practice, the Special Operations Force (SOF) specific core tasks of “Direct Action” and “Special Reconnaissance” increasingly drew SEALs away from the MEU(SOC). Operation Eastern Exit conducted in 1993 appears to be the last combined naval AFO that supported the Joint Force.<sup>51</sup> In 1993, then Major Lawrence Nicholson conducted a detailed study of the MEU(SOC) program titled *An Analysis of the twenty-one missions of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable*<sup>52</sup>. During the conduct of this study, Maj Nicholson interviewed 125 field grade officers; his findings are summarized:

The study found that only four of the 21 missions warranted inclusion as truly "special" operations missions. The study recommended that the remaining 17 missions be deleted from the list of MEU (SOC) missions and be re-named as MAGTF capabilities. This recommendation was based upon their not meeting a series of four established criteria. The missions that were recommended to be retained as MEU(SOC) missions were: (1) in-extremis hostage rescue, (2) tactical and clandestine recovery operations, (3) maritime interdiction operations, and 4) gas and oil platform seizure operations.

AFO were not mentioned within the content of Nicholson’s study, however, the tasks included within AFO were. The Marines surveyed recommended including clandestine reconnaissance and surveillance and direct action operations as core MAGTF missions and not specifically

identifying these capabilities as “special”.<sup>53</sup> Of note, there appeared to be significant debate at this point whether the MAGTF should conduct clandestine operations.

From 1993 to 1997, a gap developed between Marine and Naval approaches to AFO. SOF procurement authorities under Major Funding Program-11 (MFP-11) enabled SEALs access to emergent technology that enhanced their command and control and clandestine capabilities (signature management) years ahead of Marine Forces.<sup>54</sup> In 1996, SEALs assigned to SOCEUR, and not the Marine/SEAL AFO force afloat, executed AFO in support of Operation ASSURED RESPONSE. The reason cited was that the ARG/MEU was too far away to be responsive.<sup>55</sup>

The concept of using theater based SEALs to support AFO grew during a series of fleet exercises and by 1998, the Navy SEALs determined that they did not need to remain on amphibious shipping to be responsive. Rather, they could move from a forward base to naval shipping temporarily during a crisis situation (or “lilly padding.”) As a result, the SEALs ceased their operational deployments with the MEU (SOC)s and began to focus solely on national special operations requirements.<sup>56</sup> Concurrently, SOCOM began to develop and refine its own concept of AFO as a subset of what would develop into first Operational Preparation of the Battlespace (OPB), then Operational Preparation of the Environment (OPE)<sup>57</sup> and finally, just Preparation of the Environment (PE).<sup>58</sup>

#### SOCOM taking the lead: 1998-2006

Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) began just over ten years after Operation Eastern Exit. General Tommy Franks, USA, then the Commander of US Central Command, selected SOF to commence ground combat operations in Afghanistan in response to the September 11th attack on the World Trade Center. A Special Operations Task Force (SOTF), embarked aboard

the USS Kitty Hawk conducted special reconnaissance, combined arms raids and deep shaping strikes from naval shipping into the southern regions of Afghanistan. In other words, SOF was conducting unilateral AFO. In contrast, the 15th MEU(SOC) was already in the North Arabian Sea but remained afloat and untasked during the conduct of AFO. Several factors possibly explain Marine omission from the plan, but the significant one was that SOF integration had significantly decreased since the Navy SEAL detachment ceased deploying with the MEU(SOC)s. The Marines, in the form of Task Force-58, did enter Afghanistan but not until four weeks after SOF began their ground campaign to secure “Objective Rhino” under the watchful eyes of a Navy SEAL element from Task Force Dagger.<sup>59</sup>

TF-58 displayed the reach and agility of the MAGTF; however, the full measure of MAGTF capabilities was not included in SOF AFO design. The 75th Ranger Regiment had raided Objective Rhino two weeks prior to the arrival of TF-58 and cleared the objective prior to the Marines arrival. In addition, Navy SEAL reconnaissance teams conducted the pre-assault reconnaissance for TF-58. The TF did not employ its 12 Marine reconnaissance teams as an advance force. The elements of TF-58 did set the conditions for follow-on General Purpose Forces, but did not employ the full extent of MAGTF capabilities.<sup>60</sup> In hindsight, TF-58 served as a bellwether for the reduction of Marine involvement in AFO in support of future operations. The beginning of OEF illustrates that SOF ashore or afloat can easily replace Marine AFO capabilities; ironically, it appears that Marine Corps leadership may have earlier identified this shortfall in Marine AFO capabilities.<sup>61</sup>

In 1999, then Commandant of the Marine Corps General Jones articulated in his planning guidance the need to “Fix Recon” to restore its ability to support the Marine operating forces.<sup>62</sup>

He tasked LtCol Giles Kyser to lead the “Fix Recon” initiatives and published the following in the July 2003 Marine Corps Gazette:

As has been evidenced by the events since 11 September 2001, the world in which our Marine Corps operates has changed, and the role of our Corps must evolve to address the challenges associated with new threats while maintaining preeminence in the area of expeditionary operations. To that end, our 32d Commandant (CMC) initiated a "fix ground recon" initiative and aggressively pursued expanding the Marine Corps' relationship and interoperability with the U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM).

Our 33d CMC has sustained those initiatives as two of the many enablers contributing to the Corps' ability to execute its capstone concept of expeditionary maneuver warfare (EMW) in the joint environment. Fixing reconnaissance allows the Corps to effectively employ its combat power at the critical time and place over the extended distances inherent in EMW operations and helps to develop one of the core specialties providing the foundation for our expanding relationship with USSOCOM. Expanding our relationship and improving our interoperability with USSOCOM ensures that our Marine air-ground task forces (MAGTFs) will be used to their potential whether they are part of our Corps' general purpose forces or expanded to include a special purpose MAGTF assigned under the combatant command of USSOCOM.<sup>63</sup>

The “Fix Recon” initiatives resulted in a brief reinvestment into Marine Recon capabilities; however, only phase-I of the “Fix Recon” initiatives were fully executed before the Marine Corps turned towards creating the Marine Special Operations Command (MARSOC).<sup>64</sup> The focus on supporting SOCOM started in 2002; General Jones responded to a request by Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld by identifying how the Marine Corps can better support USSOCOM. The result was that “in addition to the 23 missions presently trained to by our MEUs, the CMC identified the following as well: direct action, special reconnaissance, coalition support, combat search and rescue, combating terrorism, foreign internal defense, humanitarian assistance, and security assistance.”<sup>65</sup> General Jones was presenting a case to increase USMC and SOF interoperability to ensure the MAGTF remained relevant to the current “war on terror”.

However, in 2003, “Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld granted unprecedented new authorities to USSOCOM. For the first time, SOF officers were eligible to command Joint Task Forces (JTFs), as well as Joint Special Operations Task Force (JSOTFs). In addition, JSOTFs could include conventional units, taking orders from the task force commander.”<sup>66</sup> The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) annual wargame explored USSOCOM’s new authorities. During this wargame, the Joint Staff tested the concept of deploying a JSOTF from naval shipping and the Navy validated that current Amphibious Ships would meet USSOCOM’s afloat requirements. The results should have been eye opening to Marine Corps leadership as USSOCOM was continuing to demonstrate its ability to replace Marine Corps capabilities afloat. LtCol Kyser presciently captured this concern in the July 2003 Marine Corps Gazette:

Predictions. With these recent events in mind, one could predict that such an expansion of SOF presence aboard naval shipping will likely come (and did in the transformation game) at the expense of Marine forces deployed aboard or matched against a limited number of amphibious platforms. Taking the argument to its logical conclusion indicates that in order to make room aboard amphibs to accommodate SOF, Marine MAGTFs could potentially become smaller and, therefore, less capable and, consequently, less relevant and used.

Implication. The implication for Marine Corps roles and missions as the Nation's amphibious/expeditionary experts and the relevance of the MAGTF are self-evident in SOF's potentially expanding use of amphibious platforms and the Navy's aggressive work to promote this option (at the expense of the MAGTF)<sup>67</sup>

Our contribution. To mitigate/counter this trend, the Marine Corps' long-term goal should be to meet USSOCOM's need for expeditionary/amphibious SOF with Marine forces permanently assigned under its command. Our current contribution should be expanded to a full-fledged component dedicated to providing that capability. Those forces will be more easily integrated with standing naval forces, better able to take advantage of the MAGTF and its holistic capabilities, will make both USSOCOM and the Marine Corps more relevant and better capable and, in the long run, preserve Marine Corps roles and missions. The Marine Corps has already begun a potential foundation for that end.<sup>68</sup>

These comments were made by LtCol Kyser ten years ago and seem to predict the challenges the Marine Corps is facing today.

USSOCOM's authorities expanded again in 2005, when Congress granted "USSOCOM's authorities under the large umbrella of "operational preparation of the environment" (OPE)<sup>69</sup> to such an extent that intelligence officers can recruit informants and directly train foreign fighters to act as paramilitary proxies.<sup>70</sup> By this point USSOCOM had expanded its definition of OPE to include AFO, and in the eyes of USSOCOM, AFO was now a combination of SOF core activities of Direct Action, Special Reconnaissance, and Foreign Internal Defense. What once was considered largely the providence of the Amphibious Force, AFO was now increasingly falling within the purview of special operations forces (SOF).<sup>71</sup>

By October 2005, the Secretary of Defense directed the formation of MARSOC as the Marine component of SOCOM. The Marines transferred the two Force Reconnaissance Companies and initially formed a unit of approximately 2,500 focused on Special Reconnaissance, Direct Action, Foreign Internal Defense and Unconventional Warfare. The original plan for MARSOC was to replace the MEU's Maritime Special Purpose Force capabilities (MSPF) therefore formalizing the Special Operations Forces within the MAGTF. MARSOC was to be the Marine Corps' bridge between USSOCOM OPE and AFO activities but the elements only deployed with the MEUs for a year before SOF requirements removed them from ARG shipping and focused them solely on meeting USSOCOM priorities. The removal of MARSOC again left the Marine Corps with a gap in capabilities to satisfy its AFO requirements.<sup>72</sup>

SOCOM only AFO: 2007-2012

The removal of MARSOC placed the Marine Corps in a dilemma. The 2009 MEU policy order assigned the MEU with the core task of conducting AFO; it also linked the (SOC) qualification specifically with Special Operations Forces.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, even if the MEU possessed a Marine certified AFO force, it would not be certified to conduct special operations without an associated MARSOC element. Losing a dedicated special operation capability was not acceptable for Service leadership. In 2008, the 34<sup>th</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Conway directed the reformation of Force Reconnaissance to close the MAGTFs gap in advance force reconnaissance capabilities. General Conway tasked the “new” Force Recon to focus specifically on MAGTF level reconnaissance operations, as he wanted to avoid the problems he had encountered during OIF I with his reconnaissance elements.<sup>74</sup>

This time General Conway elected to establish the Force Recon companies as an organic element of the Division Recon Battalions citing the associated cost saving.<sup>75</sup> His actions prompted another study titled the “Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance (EGR) Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA).” The EGR CBA picked up where the “Fix Recon” initiatives left off and analyzed Marine Corps concept of operations, AFO requirements and current capabilities against a series of Defense Planning Scenarios (DPS) to identify capability gaps and recommend associated solutions. The EGR CBA identified a number of critical gaps that prevented the Marine Corps from conducting AFO and recommended a number of non-material and material solutions.<sup>76</sup> The findings of the EGR CBA were presented to the Marine Requirements Oversight Council (MROC) in August 2010, and the solutions were accepted by all but one MROC member; the Deputy Commandant for Manpower and Reserve Affairs (DC, M&RA) non-concurred with the CBA findings due to the pending Force Structure Review Group (FSRG). As of February 2013, the EGR CBA recommendations are still in Headquarters Marine Corps



staffing. The result is that Force Recon is deploying in support of the MEUs but they lack most of the training, certification and equipment required to partner with SOF during the conduct of AFO.

In 2011, the ACWG published its final report titled “Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century.” The ACWG paper specifically addressed the obstacles facing Marine Forces and SOF during the transition from pre-crisis activities to combat operations. In other words, the ACWG identified the gaps integration of Marine and SOF during conduct of amphibious Advance Force Operations (AFO). Also in 2011, Admiral Olson, then COMUSSOCOM, testified to congress that USSCOM “provides to the Geographic Combatant Commanders [forces that] are the most culturally attuned partners, most lethal hunter/killers, and most responsive, agile, innovative, and efficiently effective advisers, trainers, problem solvers, and warriors that any nation has to offer.” He explained that SOF indirect and direct methods are achieving national objectives and adapting to emergent threats. He stated that “[SOF’s] value comes from both our high level of skills and our nontraditional methods of applying them, which is to say that our principal asset is the quality of our people. Whether they are conducting a precision raid, organizing a village police force, arranging for a new school or clinic, or partnering with counterpart forces, they do so in a manner that has impressive effects” and “because Special Operations Forces live in both of these worlds, we become the force of first choice for many missions.”<sup>77</sup>

Finally, in 2012 the Marine Corps executed its annual Title 10 wargame “Expeditionary Warrior (EW12).” This exercise tested many of the concepts from the ACWG against emergent threats. Of note, the exercise participants identified that an “approach to maritime advance force operations to shape the operational environment for littoral access is needed to close tactical

integration and interoperability gaps between SOF and naval forces.” The EW participants reported that:<sup>78</sup>

- Gaps in doctrine, training and education exist in the command arrangements and command relationships among the Navy, Marine Corps and SOF.
- Doctrine and concepts to address C2 interoperability and integration are either absent or too ambiguous to develop tactics, techniques and procedures for real world operations.
- The supported/supporting dynamic is often colored by operational philosophies – GPF are generally more comfortable with unity of command to ensure unity of effort in the joint force commander’s AO, while SOF seek to maximize operational independence in order to fulfill taskings from a parallel chain of command (e.g., national taskings via the TSOC).
- Inadequate integrated training between GPF and SOF was reflected in the lack of SOF participation in Exercise Bold Alligator in January-February 2012.
- GPF and SOF often plan and train separately, under the assumption that they will be operating in different AOs. However, operational realities compel continuous interaction between GPF and SOF.
- Marines and SOF are highly complementary and have several similar capabilities and characteristics.<sup>79</sup>

The most relevant take-away from EW12, however, was that “CJTF taskings would likely preoccupy SOF that were already operating in theater underscoring the need for an organic amphibious reconnaissance [and precision raid] capability within ARG/MEUs – as reconnaissance Marines were utilized to fill the ranks of the U.S. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC).”<sup>80</sup> The members of EW12 identified that SOF, though highly capable, is not a viable solution to meet the Marine Corps’ operating concepts.

## **Chapter 2: The Challenge - Today’s Reality**

Based on the precedent set since 2001, it appears that Joint Force Commanders (JFC) link most AFO to USSOCOM’s core pre-crisis activities.<sup>81</sup> Both USSOCOM’s Preparation of the Environment (PE) concepts,<sup>82</sup> which include AFO, and the direction provided by the current

National Security Strategy (NSS) drive the linkage between SOF pre-crisis activities and AFO.<sup>83</sup> The current NSS breaks with some previous administrations by emphasizing the value of global cooperation, developing wider security partnerships and helping other nations provide for their own defense.<sup>84</sup> It places heavy value on the non-military elements of national power and focuses the military on the efficient use of “soft” military power to support the civilian instruments of national security--diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action and economic reconstruction and development.

To meet this end, USSOCOM has redefined AFO to address all activities that shape the operational environment prior to hostilities. USSOCOM’s definition of AFO is (U): “Operations conducted by selected, uniquely capable elements which precede the main forces into the area of operations to further refine the location of the enemy/target and further develop the battlespace...”<sup>85</sup> AFO included those activities involving active measures to develop contacts/networks that will benefit future operations. USSOCOM’s definition for AFO expands the scope of current joint doctrine by introducing the unconventional warfare concepts of “through, by, and with” to shape the operating environment while including unilateral actions when required.<sup>86</sup> The SOF definition does retain the historical requirement for covert, clandestine, or low-visibility capabilities, which has resulted in these attributes now considered Special Operations (SO) and outside of the scope of the General Purpose Force (GPF), the Marine Corps inclusive.

In contrast, the Marine Corps AFO concepts remain tied to amphibious operations and do not specifically embrace the SO-like attributes of AFO, which seems to enable leaders to discount the MAGTFs SO-like capabilities required for AFO. Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC) concept for *Amphibious Operations in 21<sup>st</sup> Century* provides

the most recent conceptual reference to AFO by the Marine Corps and frames the service's current concept of AFO:

An advance force is currently defined as a task-organized element of the amphibious force, which precedes the main body to the objective area. Its function is to prepare the objective for the main assault by conducting operations such as reconnaissance, seizure of supporting positions, minesweeping, preliminary bombardment, underwater demolitions, and air support. In light of changes in joint force doctrine, organization, and capabilities, the advance force may need to be redefined as a joint, versus naval, task organization. Amphibious ships, surface combatants, LCS, submarines, and a variety of aircraft and water craft may be employed to deliver and/or recover those portions of the advance force operating inshore or ashore, often under clandestine conditions. Upon arrival of the main body in the objective area, the advance force is usually disestablished and forces revert to the landing force, amphibious task force, or other designated joint, Service, or functional commands.<sup>87</sup>

This concept contains the historical attributes of AFO: a task-organized advance body that shapes the environment, “often under clandestine conditions” to enable the main body to transition into the operating environment; but it lacks specific weight behind the precision/maturity required by the force. This expansion of the AFO concept resulted in the development of the AFO task within the MCTL.

To shape the battlespace in preparation for the main assault of an amphibious or Joint force by providing battlespace awareness and conducting such operations as reconnaissance, seizure of supporting positions, minesweeping, preliminary bombardment, underwater demolitions, and air support.

- Capable of shaping the battlespace in preparation for the main assault or other operations of an amphibious or Joint force.
- Capable of providing intelligence actionable by MAGTF, Naval or Joint forces.
- Battlespace awareness provided to supported command(s).
- Capable of coordinating the activities of Naval, Joint or combined forces and assets.<sup>88</sup>

The codification of AFO in the Marine Corps lexicon is significant as it sets the conditions for the Marine Corps to close its conceptual gap with the Joint Force. However, the challenge is that many of these elements are spread across the MAGTF in various chains of command.

In addition to the conceptual and doctrinal challenges internal to the Joint Force are the external challenges associated with the future operating environment. The *ACWG report* articulates the complexities of the future operating environment:

The uneven pace of both horizontal and vertical shifts in global power will continue to create new instabilities and reignite old ones. Hybrid threats and unconventional area-denial methods must drive the joint force to think of 'threats' and 'enemies' in new ways; while regional competitors, WMD proliferators and terrorists continue to challenge. These challenges suggest an increased demand for forces that can respond rapidly from the global commons, providing a range of capabilities against threats posed by states, non-states, and hybrid proxies.<sup>89</sup>

The *ACWG Report* identifies that the proliferation of technology and weapons capabilities have exponentially increased threat anti-access and area denial capabilities.<sup>90</sup> In respect to Joint AFO capabilities this means that techniques for gaining clandestine access to the operating environment that were common practice a decade ago (scout-swimmers, helicopters, low-level parachutists) are no longer relevant to the Joint Force.<sup>91</sup> Today, and in the future, SOF and MAGTF AFO elements must gain clandestine access to the operating environment utilizing methods and technology that counters anti-access capabilities and technology. Therefore, one can assume that for any AFO force to remain relevant in the future, it must ensure its capabilities expand to counter the threat and not be lulled by past success and performance.<sup>92</sup>

### Current Marine Corps Capabilities

The Marine Corps AFO capabilities are resident with the MAGTF and extend, in concept, beyond MAGTF Recon, to include any elements within the MAGTF, specifically the MEU and Marine Corps Intelligence Surveillance Reconnaissance Enterprise (MCISR-E), that are employed in advance of the main force. Marine AFO is no longer a “Recon centric” operation but requires highly trained Marine infantry, Intelligence elements, and logistics elements. The Marine concept for AFO now extends beyond a naval specific organization to a

joint organization. Accepting that AFO is joint in nature is a significant shift from previous Marine Corps concepts and enables the current discussions regarding the role of Marines and SOF during the conduct of AFO. However, as sound as the Marine Corps AFO concepts and organization seem, they suffer from a lack of unified doctrine, training and resourcing resulting from disjointed command and control and divergent headquarters advocacy. In sum, the Marine Corps still approaches AFO as an “ad hoc” task organized force that can be brought together in response to a crisis.

### Challenges facing the Marine Corps

The Marine Corps must understand and accept that AFO has evolved from preparing for an Amphibious Assault into a complex series of clandestine operations. By not understanding this change, Marine capabilities have been underutilized by the Joint Force consistently since the mid-1990’s. The Marine Corps’ requirements for AFO are valid and located throughout service doctrine, concepts and capability development documents. Of note, these requirements extend beyond the clandestine use of MAGTF reconnaissance to include the whole of the MAGTFs capabilities, specifically Marine Infantry conducting precision operations. Yet, even with AFO referenced numerous times to “Assured Access” and “Forcible Entry,” the Marine Corps’ failed to overcome a lack of common joint doctrine, training and resourcing, in addition to the counter arguments which present a compelling argument why the Marine Corps should rely on SOF for AFO. The following sections address these findings to illustrate the challenges that exist.

### Impacts of Conflicting Doctrine

Joint doctrine has changed to reflect SOFs primary role in AFO. Within the context of Joint Forcible entry, Joint Publications 3-0 identifies that:

SOF may precede forcible entry forces to identify, clarify, and modify conditions in the lodgment. SOF may conduct the assaults to seize small, initial lodgments such as airfields or seaports. They may provide or assist in employing fire support and conduct other operations in support of the forcible entry, such as seizing airfields or conducting reconnaissance of landing zones or amphibious landing sites. They may conduct special reconnaissance and direct action well beyond the lodgment to identify, interdict, and destroy forces that threaten the conventional entry force.<sup>93</sup>

When compared to the concept of naval AFO, the Joint concept of AFO embraces SOF's "unique" attributes as critical to supporting Joint Operations but it affords the ability of non-SOF to support these types of operations. The only noticeable difference is the reference to Special Operations - both demand selected individuals who are rigorously trained, and resources to accomplish high-risk missions ahead of the Joint Force.

By not specifically stating the Marine Corps AFO capabilities, joint and inter-service doctrine fails to accurately represent MEU capabilities and create a common misunderstanding regarding MEU capabilities. The following excerpts from Joint Publication 3-02, Amphibious Operations and MCWP 3-31.5 Ship to Shore Operations represent the confusion found within service doctrine:

Joint Pub 3-02: A MEU does not regularly conduct opposed amphibious operations and can only conduct amphibious operations of limited duration and scope. Its expeditionary warfare capabilities make it extremely useful for crisis response, immediate reaction operations such as NEO, humanitarian and civic assistance, limited objective attacks, raids, and for acting as an advance force for a larger follow-on MAGTF. The special operations capable designation of a MEU (special operations capable) indicates the presence of a Marine special operations company (MSOC). This MSOC is typically chartered to perform three core missions: direct action, special reconnaissance, and foreign internal defense. The MSOC is OPCON to the geographic combatant commander, normally executed through the theater special operations command commander.<sup>94</sup>

MCWP 3-33.5: Should the MSOC be tasked to disembark amphibious shipping for a separate mission, the MAGTF would be referred to as a MEU vice a MEU(SOC). A MEU(SOC) does not routinely conduct opposed amphibious assault operations and can only conduct amphibious operations of limited duration. Its special operations capability

makes it well suited for crisis response, immediate reaction operations such as NEO, limited objective attacks, raids, and for acting as an advance force for a larger follow-on MAGTF. A MEU(SOC) can rapidly deploy and employ via amphibious shipping, by strategic airlift, through marshaling with MPF assets, or any combination thereof.<sup>95</sup>

The difference between these doctrinal representations of MAGTF capabilities leaves much to interpretation and can lead to a belief that the MEU is only capable of conducting missions in support of SOF. The second definition infers that only the MEU's "special operations" capabilities allow it to accomplish its core missions and that these special operations capacities are only associated with MSOC, a notion that can only be problematic in the future.

Joint doctrine provides authoritative guidance based upon extant capabilities of the Armed Forces of the United States, it provides a basis for the integrated and synchronized application of those unique capabilities within the Armed Forces.<sup>96</sup> In simple terms, doctrine drives force development, therefore how can the Service produce a relevant capability if the doctrine is, in fact, flawed? The answer is that the Service cannot. The differences in Joint and Service doctrine set an environment in which the Marine Corps develops AFO capabilities that do not match the Joint Force's concepts for employment.

The difference in Joint and Naval AFO doctrine hinders a full appreciation of Marine capabilities and results in a lack of Marine and SOF integration during the transition from pre-crisis activities to crisis response. This ultimately leads to an underutilization of the MAGTF to support National objectives in crisis response. While the Marine Corps continues to invest in the MEU program, it seemingly does so without an understanding of the level of competence and proficiency required to enter a developing operational environment with SOF to shape the environment so the Joint Force will achieve an operational advantage.

#### Limited AFO training



The impact of the lack of a common, doctrine based, understanding of AFO transfers to the MAGTF staffs and AFO units (Intelligence, Reconnaissance and Infantry). Interviews conducted during this research revealed there is a perception that a majority of MAGTF commanders have limited to no practical experience in directing and coordinating joint clandestine AFO.<sup>97</sup> One officer described how his MEF is currently planning for a Marine Expeditionary Brigade (MEB) level training exercise, in which the MEF staff does not appear to possess an operational concept for how to employ its AFO entities in conjunction with SOF. He cited that the general perception within the staff is that pre-landing AFO could be conducted in a relatively short period – 72 hours. The EW 12 out-brief detailed why the MAGTF requires detailed AFO to support Marine Corps concepts of Operational Maneuver from the Sea (OMFTS).<sup>98</sup> Based off SOF planning guidelines, detailed AFO is conducted over the course of weeks, if not months or years. Therefore, the commonly held belief that AFO can be conducted in 72 hours is false as it does not adequately support the in-depth study of the environment to enable operational access.

The result of the MEF's lack of a detailed concept for AFO is that General Conway's Force Recon plan has failed and SOF is increasingly replacing the Ground Combat Element (GCE) as the "go-to" force for offensive AFO actions - maritime raids and precision strike. Today the Force Recon companies do not enjoy a direct command and staff relationship with the MEF. For a myriad of reasons, the Recon Battalion Commanders now control the resourcing and focus for training. Since these Battalion commanders work for the Division, they are not driven to invest in the specialized training, certification and integration required to conduct clandestine AFO to the degree and capacity required to meet Joint Concepts. This does not mean the Force

Recon companies are not training to their mission essential requirements; they just are not able to train to the degree that is required to collaborate with SOF and develop a joint AFO capability.<sup>99</sup>

Therefore, the current lack of understanding, standardization and experience regarding AFO at the MAGTF level causes a reduction in the MAGTF capabilities to apply its organic forces in conjunction with SOF during the transition from pre-crisis to crisis operations. How does this happen? Marine Force Component Commanders (MARFORs) validated the requirement for the MAGTF to conduct AFO within the 2010 EGR CBA. The EGR CBA contains six core AFO tasks for the MAGTF: Command and Control, Amphibious Reconnaissance, Ground Reconnaissance, Battlespace Shaping, Raids and Training partner forces. Yet, though the MARFORs validated these tasks, they have not made MAGTF AFO a priority for force generation, which allows the MEF staffs and Major Subordinate Element (MSE) commanders to focus resources in other areas. This breakdown between the requirement and the solution is forcing the Marine Corps to follow the Navy's lead and become more reliant on SOF.

### Limited Resources

Finally, the most significant impact to the decline in Marine Corps AFO capabilities is link to service-level decisions in 2003. At that time, the Marine Corps indefinitely deferred the solutions associated with the findings of the "Fix Recon" initiative and 2003 "Expeditionary Warrior" war-games. This deferral is understandable for a time as Service leadership were focused on Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF), however, it must be noted that by neglecting the MEUs integration with SOCOM the Marine Corps has limited the options available to the National Command Authority and undermined the potential for an integrated effort. In sum all

these variables result in a perception within the Joint Force that the MEU is a suboptimal force for AFO, a traditional MEU mission set.

The Marine Corps is challenged to assign and stabilize personnel within the AFO organizations. The Marine Corps' personnel management system is not conducive to what greater emphasis on AFO would require. Marine officers are generalists; allowing some to become clandestine collectors (DCS), etc. necessarily causes them to specialize. This works against the individual (promotions, etc.) as well as the organization. Additionally, the Marine Corps acquisition system cannot evolve, or adapt, to the threat as quickly as SOF. SOF is empowered by uniquely legislated budget and acquisition authorities in Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11). MFP-11 allows rapid and flexible acquisition of “SOF-peculiar” equipment and modification of service common systems to meet special operations requirements. MFP-11 funding supports SOF’s persistent global presence meeting the SECDEF’s guidance for forces “agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats. Additionally, SOF is able to leverage other funding sources to enable operations; these sources include Military Intelligence Program (MIP), National Intelligence Program (NIP), Personnel Recovery funding, Section 1206 and Section 1207 funding.

So if the Marine Corps historically under resources AFO capabilities or does not produced enough capacity to meet the Joint Forces’ requirements why does it still demand a service specific AFO capability set? Why does the Marine Corp not follow the lead of the US Navy and US Army and rely solely on SOF to conduct these types of operations? These questions are valid and deserve exploration within the context of this paper.

SOF is the solution:

Many have argued that SOCOM / SOF already conduct AFO for the Joint Force, that the Joint Force does not require any Marine Corp SOF-like capabilities<sup>100</sup> and that the Corps is simply seeking additional funding streams and prestige by inviting itself into this realm of special operations. This argument has merit as the association of AFO with special operations (SO), specifically Special Reconnaissance (SR), has already decreased any proclivity of the Joint Force to consider Marine Forces for missions for which they may have a requirement to perform. MARSOC possesses the potential be the Marine Corps' only AFO element. SOF is the simple answer; it already employs a vast network of liaisons and planners throughout the component commands and the interagency. SOF continues to seek to eliminate non-contributing layers of decision-makers to enhance clarity, agility and speed across all phases and all activities. SOF's hands-on approach to coordination and integration enables them to collaborate with the Joint Force during steady state operations and pre-coordinate AFO activities.

In contrast, the Marine Corps does not engage the Joint Force or the interagency to the same degree. A senior Marine Corps Intelligence Officer serving within the Intelligence Community stated, "That the Corps influence here [CIA] is severely limited due, in part to the lack of LNO integration." He described how many meetings and conferences focused pre-crisis operations are missing a key element... a representative from the Marine Forces to be deployed in the area of responsibility. This lack of participation signals to the various Joint/Interagency Task Forces (JIATF) that the Marine Corps is not interested in Joint AFO. The other advantage SOF possesses over the Marine Corps is MFP-11. SOF can allocate its finite resources effectively to generate capabilities. SOF is not constrained to the same degree as the conventional forces. Their freedom results in SOF being more ready than the Marine Corps to respond to a crisis "when the nation is least ready."

MARSOC and SOF are an excellent solution for the Joint Force. However, as shown by the ACWG report and EW12 exercise report, SOF lacks the capacity to meet the Marine Corps requirements during crisis. Both reports cite that SOF may be unavailable when the Marine Corps need them the most. This point can be argued, but it opens enough doubt to make service leadership nervous. If SOF wants to be the sole joint capability, SOCOM must be willing to assign MARSOC or other SOF elements underneath the JFMCC and MAGTF commander for the duration of entry operations. While there are merits to the MEUs working closely with SOF, Marine Forces cannot become dependent on SOF for AFO or it risks irrelevancy in two of its core missions – assured access and forced entry.<sup>101</sup> In sum, the Joint Force cannot guarantee enough SOF to meet the MAGTF's AFO requirements. MARSOC was forced upon the Marine Corps because there was a shortfall in SOCOM's ability to fulfill its existing missions outside of support to the GPF. So from the development of MARSOC, it appears that SOCOM knew it was not going to support the Marine Corps, as it required more elements to support SOCOM specific requirements. Therefore, it is in the best interest of SOF, the Marine Corps and the Joint Force for the Marine Corps to develop a stand-alone AFO capability that is fully integrated and interoperable with SOF and the rest of the Joint Force.

### **Chapter 3: Conclusion**

The Marine Corps is the nation's expeditionary force in readiness, task organized and able to conduct operations across the entire spectrum of military operations. General Amos likens the Marine Corps to a "Middleweight Fighter" capability to fight up or down in weight class as required. This analogy is somewhat fitting as the Marine Corps is required to operate seamlessly across the spectrum of conflict to reinforce persistent or crisis operations through the

conduct of specialized and conventional operations. However, the “Middleweight Fighter” comparison does not go far enough. In light of this research, it seems that the Marine Corps is closer, in context, to a “Mixed Martial Arts” fighter, capable of fighting across the spectrum of combat, utilizing whatever style is required. To say this in terms of military operations, the Marine Corps provide a force capable of non-persistent Special Operations and non-persistent Conventional Operations.

The Marine Corps must close its AFO capability and employment gap with SOF to retain its start to finish “Forcible Entry” capability. The reality is that Marine Corps AFO capabilities have atrophied and according to the EGR CBA will take at least five years to regain what was lost to MARSOC. Without a relevant AFO force, the Marine Corps will become dependent upon SOF to land on foreign shores. Service leadership must determine whether it will accept the risk of relying on SOF or whether it will invest fully in regaining an AFO capability. If so, the Marine Corps will have to commit to executing the ACWG, EGR CBA and ISR Study recommendations. If the Marine Corps invests in AFO to the full measure, it then will be able to enable the Joint Force, in partnership with SOF, to enter a crisis to the greatest advantage possible. Regardless of the AFO solution selected, it is apparent that the Marine Corps will have to invest in increasing the training and readiness standards of its expeditionary forces to maintain parity with SOF or risk losing its role as the “Nation’s 911 Force.”

## **Potential Solutions**

The Marine Corps' history of disbanding or underfunding its AFO capabilities has widened the gap between SOF and the Marines' desired capabilities. In the past, this gap was recoverable but today the Joint Force is facing new future threats, emergent technology, and changes in authorities that severely constrain the Marine Corps ability to redevelop a force with the attributes and resources needed to be relevant during future AFO. Much like SOF, Marine AFO capabilities cannot be made "overnight." These units must be generated and resourced to a high state of readiness consistently. During this current fiscal down turn, the Marine Corps will have to make a decision on whether to invest fully in its Recon and MEU Infantry capabilities or commit to supporting SOCOM and being reliant on SOF to meet advance force requirements.

This leaves the Marine Corps with a decision. The service can divest in AFO due to the associated cost and challenges, therefore relying solely on SOF to gain access and set the conditions for follow on MAGTF and Joint Force operations. If this direction is unacceptable, then the service must hedge its limited resources towards the MEU and MEF AFO capabilities by investing to support the Service's core operational concepts. The Marine Corps must invest in developing and maintaining the full measure of AFO capabilities, understanding that SOCOM is not the "standards bearer" for AFO. The recommendations that follow outline potential solutions to explore in addition to the recommendations provided by the ACWG and EGR CBA.

### **Joint Concept for AFO: Leveraging Uniqueness through Common Practices**

The objective of a Joint Concept for AFO (J-AFO) is to achieve better synergy between Marine Forces and SOF during the conduct of Advance Force Operation. The central idea is that Marines and SOF integrate as quickly as possible to ensure unity of command and effort. The

concept assumes that AFO are part of a “whole of government” approach to crisis response. The intent of this concept is to: (1) provide the GCC a means for conducting AFO that has not been realized despite 10 years of war, (2) achieves GCC objectives in an agile, low-profile/limited footprint manner, is flexible and (3) can operate across functional boundaries through common equipment, training, and tactics, techniques and procedures (TTP). One method to construct a Joint Concept is to divide AFO into two stages:

Stage 1 –**ARG/MEU OPCON to CJSOTF/JSOTF** MEU provides mobile platform that can deliver assets to multiple locations, beyond visual range. Upon authorization to begin AFO activities, the Theater Special Operations Component (TSOC) will deploy forces into country orange to initiate their special operations campaign. Marine AFO elements, including the MEUs, will attach to the TSOC to begin shaping the environment for follow-on forces. The attachment of the Marine AFO elements is essential during this initial phase to ensure unity of command and unity of effort within the environment. At this point Marine Forces are operating within the SOF concept of operations. The MAGTF elements would focus on identifying access points for the follow-on MAGTF while the SOF elements are conducting SR, DA and UW to shape the strategic environment.

Stage 2- **SOF are OPCON to ARG/MEU** Once the Joint Force Maritime Component Commander (JFMCC) established its maritime area of operations, the Marine Forces working under the TSOC will transfer OPCON to the JFMCC. MEU has ability to assume command and control of the maritime component AFO, providing control for multiple task forces and sub-components. At this point, SOF elements are assigned to support the JFMCC and enable MAGTF ops. The SOF elements would focus on conducting SR, and DA while the MAGTF AFO elements are to shape the operational environment through the conduct of reconnaissance and raids.

This construct outlines one way in which the Joint Force may array its Marine and SOF capabilities to enable and support shaping and pre-crisis operations (through termination), however, a joint concept alone will not solve the capability gaps between the Marine Corps and SOF.

DOTMLPF-P: A Joint Matter



The following are additional Doctrine, Organizational, Training/Readiness, Material, Leadership, Personnel, Facilities and Policy (DOTMLPF-P) recommendations to close these gaps:

Doctrine/Concepts: Update Joint, SO and Marine Corps doctrine to reflect the new environment. Introduce these concepts to Marine Corps and SOF officers earlier in their career (Capt/LT). Ensure an updated definition Advance Force Operations bridges the clandestine activities of OPE.

Organizational: Place (2-3) Marines inside staff cells at appropriate HQs (i.e. USSOCOM, TSOCs, Joint Staff J37 DDSO, USD(I), DIA/Defense Clandestine Service (DCS), and DIA/Defense Counterterrorism Center (DCTC) and ASD SOLIC) in order to facilitate communication and increase understanding of MAGTF capes/roles. In the case of USSOCOM, the Marine Corps should provide this cell, not MARSOC, which, as a component of SOCOM, does not speak for USMC as a general-purpose force.

Training/Readiness: Think and plan for joint operations and develop capabilities based on the needs of the joint-force commander not on the needs of the MEF and or the Service leadership. Ensure these capabilities translate into pre-deployment certification standards and that both SOF and interagency are effectively integrated into tactical unit training and exercises.

#### Exercise Interoperability and Integration

- i. Army SF is already doing this at WTI – expand it.
- ii. Expand ITXs, MEUexs to include USMC-SOCOM AFO, and offer USMC participation to USSOCOM exercises.
- iii. Assign Special Operations Force Liaison Elements (SOFLEs) to deploying MAGTFs.

Material: Resource for interoperability, either through organic MFP-2 funds or by pursuing MFP-like authorities (rapid acquisition and SOF unique) USSOCOM is empowered by unique legislated budget and acquisition authorities in Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11). The service must seek to mirror the MPF-11 like acquisitions in order to ensure interoperability and relevance with SOF elements.

Leadership: Marine Corps leadership must resist the historic tendency to cut AFO capability during times of peace and now financial uncertainty. As a service, it should seek to cut capabilities elsewhere and not AFO. The Marine Corps must learn from past mistakes especially in this new multi-spectrum world we are living in. This will keep the

MEU and Marine Corps relevant, which is the fear of the institutionalists..."why do we need a Marine Corps?"

Identify AFO requirements and capacity in detail within OPLANS and CONPLANS. AFO elements should be "always forward" during every phase of steady state operations to major combat operations. If this does not occur, the Service will remain passive and reactive if its "eyes and ears" are maintained at home station. The Service should strive to always be aggressively scouting, reconnoitering, and positioning itself to be "in the right place, at the right time" with the necessary leader's recon to welcome the main force and set conditions for its success.

Policy: Develop policy to codify certification of Joint AFO elements, specifically addressing reconnaissance and surveillance.

This paper only touches the surface of the capabilities of a combined Marine and SOF AFO force. The challenge of operational access remains today and success is largely determined by the how well the Joint Force transition from pre-crisis activities to AFO. The high-risk nature of advance operations has caused the GCCs to rely solely on SOF to mitigate these challenges but let us assume that the solutions gap is closed with SOF by 2020. Joint Force success will depend on efforts to shape favorable access conditions in advance, which in turn requires a coordinated Marine Corps and SOF approach.

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<sup>1</sup> 2012 Report to the House Armed Services Committee on the Posture of the United States Marine Corps February 16, 2012, 112th Cong., 8 (2012) (General James F. Amos Commandant of the Marine Corps).

<sup>2</sup> Jim Garamone, "Marine Commandant Describes Progress in Afghanistan," defense.gov, Feb 18, 2011, <http://www.defense.gov/news/newsarticle.aspx?id=62870>

<sup>3</sup> CMC

<sup>4</sup> Michael S Repass, *Combating Terrorism with Preparation of the Battlespace*, U.S. Army War College. 7 April 2003, 9 - MajGen Repass explains that "PCA are the full range of training activities conducted in a foreign country or region during peacetime and prior to a crisis that help shape the security environment and prepare for future operations in that country or region." Marines would associate PCA with many of their forward deployed activities, namely: theater security cooperation (TSC) and security force assistance (SFA).

<sup>5</sup> According to the Marine Corps Common Task List (MCTL), AFO are military actions: to shape the battlespace in preparation for the main assault or other operations of an amphibious or Joint force by providing battlespace awareness and conducting such operations as reconnaissance, seizure of supporting positions, preliminary bombardment, and air support. <https://www.mccdc.usmc.mil/> accessed 20 January 2013.

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- <sup>6</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps. *Ship-to-shore movement*. MCWP 3-31.5. Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, May 2007. 4-7. Additional information can be found in Chapter XIII of JP 3-02.
- <sup>7</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-18 Forcible Entry* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2008, xi, III-1. MCDP 1-0 Marine Corps Operations refers to JP 3-18 to define AFO.
- <sup>8</sup> Richard Whittle, *How Come No One's Calling' Marines, The 911Force?*  
<http://defense.aol.com/bloggers/richard-whittle/How> accessed 20 February 2013.
- <sup>9</sup> For a detailed analysis of the future strategic operating environment see the January 2012 publication of *Sustaining U.S. Leadership: Priorities for 21st Century Defense*.
- <sup>10</sup> See Amphibious Capabilities Working Group's (ACWG) "Naval Amphibious Capability in the 21st Century," April 2012, Supplemental Material S-1. This document highlights several areas for complimentary use and recommendations.
- <sup>11</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *2012 Capstone Concept for Joint Operations (CCJO): Joint Force* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 10 September), 9.
- <sup>12</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Defense Budget and Priority Choice*, (Washington, DC: Office of the Under Secretary of Defense Comptroller, January 2012), 1
- <sup>13</sup> U.S. President, *The National Security Strategy of the United States of America*. Washington, D.C.: The White House, January 2013.
- <sup>14</sup> CCJO, 4-8.
- <sup>15</sup> For more information, see the US. Department of Defense Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC) and the US. Army and Marine Corps Concept for Joint Forcible entry.
- <sup>16</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps. *Marine Corps Operations*. MCDP 1-0. Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 9 August 2011. 1-15, 2-18 to 2-30.
- <sup>17</sup> JOAC. Introduction
- <sup>18</sup> ACWG, 38.
- <sup>19</sup> Amos, testimony
- <sup>20</sup> Ray W. Stubbe, *AARUGHA!: History of Specialized and Force-level Reconnaissance Activities and Units of the United States Marine Corps, 1900-1974*, Fleet Marine Reference Publication 12-21 (MCB Quantico, HQMC: Historical Division, 1981), 2
- <sup>21</sup> Ibid, 3.
- <sup>22</sup> Headquarters, Marine Special Operation Command, *Organization, Roles & Missions*, Pub 1-0 (Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina), 3-22. Preparation of the Environment is defined as: Preparation of the Environment (PE) is an umbrella term for actions taken by or in support of SOF to develop an environment for current or future operations and activities. SOF conduct PE in support of GCC plans and orders to alter or shape the operational environment to create conditions conducive to the success of a full spectrum of military operations. The regional focus cross-cultural insights, language capabilities, and relationships of SOF provided access to and influences nations where the presence of conventional US forces is not warranted.
- <sup>23</sup> Stubbe, 4.
- <sup>24</sup> Maj Dion Williams, *Naval Reconnaissance, Instructions for the Reconnaissance of Bays, Harbors, and Adjacent Country*, 2d ed, (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1917).
- <sup>25</sup> Stubbe, 7. - Naval Reconnaissance included enemy naval dispositions, hydrographic and meteorological data, suitability of beaches and sea areas for making a landing from a navigational standpoint, locating mines and underwater obstacles, selecting suitable approaches to landing areas, and establishing necessary navigational aids.
- <sup>26</sup> Stubbe, 8. - Military reconnaissance includes nature of terrain in proposed zones of operation and enemy dispositions ashore--defensive works, strong points, machinegun and artillery positions, location and intensity of defensive barrage, landing fields, location of reserves and their route of advance, and supply and ammunition facilities.
- <sup>27</sup> Stubbe, 7. - Types of information to be obtained and actions to be accomplished through amphibious reconnaissance included the following: (1) identification of "fixes" on the beach and possible establishment of navigation aids; (2) Determination of enemy naval dispositions within and in the vicinity of the landing area; (3) Determination of suitability of beaches and sea areas required for the conduct of the operation~ (4) Location of underwater obstacles and other obstructions; (5) Ascertainment if beaches were gassed; (6) Location of mined areas; (7) Determination of enemy dispositions on shore and selection of suitable targets, landmarks, and a1m1ng points for fire support ships; and determination of the enemy air force. (Source: Division of Fleet Training, Office of Naval

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Operations, United States Navy, Landing Operations Doctrine, 1938, P.T.P. 167, Washington, D.C., 1938. Para. 209, Cf. Para. 437.)

<sup>28</sup> Williams. 917ed. , 7.

<sup>29</sup> Stubbe, 7.

<sup>30</sup> ibid, 5.

<sup>31</sup> ibid, 8.

<sup>32</sup> Lieutenant Colonel John P. Piedmont, *Det One U.S. Marine Corps U.S. Special Operations Command Detachment, 2003-2006* (Washington D.C: USMC History Division, 2010), 14.

<sup>33</sup> Capt James R. Stockman, *The Battle for Tarawa*, (MCB Quantico, HQMC: Historical Division, 1947), 2-3, 12-17.

<sup>34</sup> Stubbe, p 49. - The principles of amphibious patrolling could be succinctly formulated into six basics: 1) A patrol must be so constituted, both as to size and equipment, that it can operate in its assigned area with minimum danger of detection; 2) Personnel assigned must be well trained in amphibious patrolling and be in good physical condition; 3) Patrols must be given simple missions capable of accomplishment and of sufficient importance to warrant sending out a patrol; 4) Patrols must be allowed sufficient time to accomplish missions assigned; 5) Patrol leaders must be chosen for their known ability and intrepidity; 6) Before departure from base, patrols and the commander of transporting craft must be carefully briefed as to where and how they will be landed and where and how they will be retrieved.

<sup>35</sup> As outlined in 10 U.S.C. § 5063 and as originally introduced under the National Security Act of 1947, it has three primary areas of responsibility: 1) The seizure or defense of advanced naval bases and other land operations to support naval campaigns; 2) The development of tactics, technique, and equipment used by amphibious landing forces in coordination with the Army and Air Force; and 3) Such other duties as the President may direct.

<sup>36</sup> Stubbe, 52.

<sup>37</sup> ibid, 52.

<sup>38</sup> Navy UDT-SEAL Museum: History, Korea". Retrieved 25 January 2013.

<sup>39</sup> Stubbe, 56.

<sup>40</sup> Stubbe, 59 – 65.

<sup>41</sup> Bruce F. Meyers, *Swift, Silent, and Deadly: Marine Amphibious Reconnaissance in the Pacific, 1942-1945*, (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2004), 134.

<sup>42</sup> <http://www.forcerecon.com/amphibrecondiary2.html> - Lesson learned in WWII and Korea showed that the Marines selected for training in Amphibious Reconnaissance should possess superior mental and physical characteristics, swimming ability and known courage; in addition, the training would include physical fitness, swimming, scaling cliffs, long hikes, patrols with light rations for several days duration, crossing streams and rivers, map reading, compass, military signs and symbols, semaphore, blinker, use of radios, ability to observe and remember closely and accurately, make detailed reports of observations, sketching, camera use, hydrography, beach study, rubber boat training and handling for a day and night and weapon knowledge." Accessed 27 February 2013

<sup>43</sup> Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps. *Ground Reconnaissance (coordinating draft)*. MCWP 2-25. Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, July 2012, 31-33. Deep operations afford commanders an opportunity to shape or prevent future close battles. Deep operations can strip away enemy capabilities, force an early culmination, or otherwise attack the enemy system so friendly forces can handle what remains when the enemy forces become a part of the close battle.

<sup>44</sup> Fred J Pushies, *Marine Force Recon*. (Minneapolis: Zenith Imprint 2003), 18–19. Two different mission types emerged during the Vietnam War, which are still implemented in the Force Reconnaissance motives today: Key Hole and Sting Ray. These practices subsequently became contemporary as "deep reconnaissance", or green operations; and "direct action", which are known as black operations. Key Hole patrols were designed purely around reconnaissance and surveillance; usually lightly equipped and armed with defensive weapons—evasive techniques were employed to break contact from the enemy should the need arise, avoiding contact with the enemy was paramount. Sting Ray operations were the exact opposite of Key Hole missions with goals more closely in line of offensive strikes, the FORECON operators were heavily armed and used artillery and/or naval gunfire support, if available. However, what began as a 'key hole' patrol could become a 'sting ray' patrol with little warning. The versatility of FORECON is demonstrated when missions quickly turn, planned or not, from a deep reconnaissance patrol to a direct action engagement.

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<sup>45</sup> Gene Wentz and B. Abell Jurus, *Men In Green Faces*. (New York: St. Martin's Paperbacks 1993).

<sup>46</sup> The Marine Corps has reduced Marine Recon after WWII, Korea, Vietnam and OIF/OEF, source HQMC Plans, Policy and Operations (PP&O) Reconnaissance Section (POG-40)

<sup>47</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-05 Joint Special Operations Doctrine* Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, - **These are operations** conducted in hostile, denied, or politically sensitive environments to achieve military, diplomatic, informational, and/or economic objectives employing military capabilities **for which there is no broad conventional force requirement**. These operations often require covert, clandestine, or low-visibility capabilities. SO are applicable across the range of military operations. They can be conducted independently or in conjunction with operations of conventional forces or other government agencies and may include operations by, with or through indigenous or surrogate forces. **SO differ from conventional operations** in degree of physical and political risk, operational techniques, mode of employment, independence from friendly support, and dependence on detailed operational intelligence and indigenous assets.

<sup>48</sup> Headquarters II Marine Amphibious Force, Special Operations Study Group, "Examination of Marine Corps Special Operations Enhancements," 19 November–17 December 1984.

<sup>49</sup> Piedmont, 1

<sup>50</sup> United States Special Operations Command, *History* (MacDill AFB: USSOCOM-HO September 1998), 3.

<sup>51</sup> Operation Eastern Exit was the successful evacuation 281 noncombatants from the US Embassy in Mogadishu, Somalia. At 0247, January 5 1991 a combined 60 man rescue force combined of 51 U.S. Marines and 9 Navy SEALs launched from the U.S.S. Guam in 2 Marine CH-53 Super Stallion Helicopters in an attempt to reach the U.S. before Embassy was overrun by Somalia elements. The ground forces were commanded by Commander Lieutenant Colonel Robert P. McAleer, USMC and comprised of infantrymen from Charlie Company 1st Battalion 2nd Marines and the SEALs were from SEAL Team 8. Charlie Company was Special Operations Capable (SOC) trained and worked extensively with SEAL Team 8 during the pre-deployment work. Operation Eastern Exit, which was executed just two-week prior to the initiation of Operation Desert Shield, served as the first the beginning of events that would lead to Operation Restore Hope.

<sup>52</sup> MajGen (then Maj) Lawrence Nicholson, *An Analysis of the twenty-one missions of the Marine Corps Expeditionary Unit Special Operations Capable* (Masters thesis, Army Command and Staff College, 1994), executive summary.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid, 94-99.

<sup>54</sup> USSOCOM is empowered by unique legislated budget and acquisition authorities in Major Force Program-11 (MFP-11). MFP-11 allows rapid and flexible acquisition of "SOF-peculiar" equipment and modification of service common systems to meet special operations requirements. MFP-11 funding supports SOF's persistent global presence meeting the SECDEF's guidance for forces "agile, flexible, and ready for the full range of contingencies and threats.

<sup>55</sup> Gregory W. Strauser, "Naval Special Warfare deployments in support of Theater Commanders: Special Operations Forces or Naval Support Elements?" (Masters Thesis, Marines Corps University, 2000), 7-8

<sup>56</sup> ibid 8-16.

<sup>57</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-13 Information Operations*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2012. Defines OPE as "non-intelligence activities conducted to plan and prepare for potential follow-on military operations" conducted under Title 10 authority. Operational Preparation of the Environment is also commonly known as Operational Preparation of the Battlespace. It is defined by USSOCOM as "Non-intelligence activities conducted prior to D-Day, H-Hour, in likely or potential areas of employment, to train and prepare for follow-on military operations."

<sup>58</sup> MARSOC Pub 1-0, 3-22.

<sup>59</sup> Col Nathan S. Lowrey, *U.S. Marines in Afghanistan, 2001-2002: From the Sea – U.S. Marines in the Global War on Terrorism* (Washington D.C: USMC History Division, 2011), 33-78

<sup>60</sup> LtCol Giles Kyser, "Fix Recon, USSOCOM, and the Future of the Corps: Food for Thought." *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2003, 17.

<sup>61</sup> Lowrey, 57-63

<sup>62</sup> Piedmont, 9.

<sup>63</sup> Kyser. 17-18

<sup>64</sup> Ibid. 17-18

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<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

2013 <sup>66</sup> <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/socom-at-25-ussocom-since-911/2/>. Accessed 15 January

AOR. <sup>67</sup> In 2010 and 2011, SOF element replaced the Ground Combat Forces on two MEU in the CENTCOM

<sup>68</sup> Kyser. 17-18

<sup>69</sup> The use of the term OPE is significant as it is seldom used outside of Special Operations channels. Joint Publication 3-13 defines OPE as “non-intelligence activities conducted to plan and prepare for potential follow-on military operations” conducted under Title 10 authority. OPE consists of the full range of peacetime and pre-crisis activities (PCA) in a potential operational area to include: engagement and training activities, pre-crisis surveys and assessments, and advance force operations (AFO), that are conducted by the Department of Defense to become “familiar with the area in which [the military] might have to work” to increased situational awareness therefore decreasing the time required to frame an emergent problem; in simple terms OPE is shaping. When OPE is combined with Intelligence Preparation of the Operating Environment (IPOE), they represents the “full spectrum of theater and strategic activities conducted prior to D-Day, H-Hour to prepare for a potential crisis or contingency.”

<sup>70</sup> Mike Markowitz, “SOCOM at 25: USSOCOM Since 9/11” *Year in Special Operations: 2012 Edition* May 2012. <http://www.defensemedianetwork.com/stories/socom-at-25-ussocom-since-911/3/> Part 1 - 4

<sup>71</sup> Markowitz, part 1-4.

<sup>72</sup> MARSOC Pub 1-0, 1-1 – 1-5.

<sup>73</sup> Commandant of the Marine Corps, *MEU Policy Order*, Marine Corps Order 3120.9C, August 4, 2009.

<sup>74</sup> Comments from Gen Conway to Maj Brian Gilman during April 2008 Executive Offsite. Gen Conway was concerned that Force Reconnaissance was too focused on Direct Action operations over MAGTG-level Reconnaissance in the 1990’s and that focus led to his concerns over their employment during OIF-I. Force and Division Reconnaissance Units were not utilized to shape the MEF’s deep battlespace. Comments were relayed to the author during billet turnover at HQMC Plans, Policies and Operations (PP&O) Ground Combat Division, Reconnaissance Section in June 2009.

<sup>75</sup> Maj Brian Gilman, “CMC Force Recon Decision Brief,” (PowerPoint presentation, Headquarters USMC, Arlington, VA, 24 January 2008).

<sup>76</sup> “Expeditionary Ground Reconnaissance (EGR) Capabilities Based Assessment (CBA),” 2012 Headquarters United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Combat Development Command (MCCDC), Quantico Va.

<sup>77</sup> *Hearing to receive testimony on U.S. Special Operations Command and U.S. Central Command in Review of The Defense Authorization Request For Fiscal Year 2012 and The Future Years Defense Program, Hearing Before the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee*, 113th Cong.

<sup>78</sup> Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, “Expeditionary Warrior 2012 (EW12) Final Report.” 14-16

<sup>79</sup> EW 12, 16

<sup>80</sup> *ibid*, 16.

<sup>81</sup> Sections 1206, 1207 and 1208 of the National Defense Authorization Act respectively provide the Department of Defense with the authority to train and equip foreign military and maritime security forces; transfer funds to the Department or State for reconstruction, stabilization and security activities in foreign countries; and reimburse foreign forces, groups or individuals supporting or facilitating ongoing counterterrorism military operations by U/S. special operations forces.

<sup>82</sup> Linda Robinson, “Plan of Attack, The Pentagon Has a New Strategy For Taking on Terrorists-and Taking Them Down.” *U.S. News and World Report*, 01 Aug 05, 3, <http://ebird.afis.mil.ebfiles/e20050725381513.html>.

<sup>83</sup> The NSS identifies the major security concerns and objectives of the President of the United States and the National Command Authority. Though general in nature, it defines the current strategic environment and focuses the development of key Defense and Inter-agency strategies. The NSS forms the framework upon which the use of the elements national power (diplomatic, information, military, and economic (DIME) combined with financial, intelligence and law (DIME-FIL)) are applied to achieve the nation’s objectives.

<sup>84</sup> Additionally, the National Strategy appears to indicate a shift towards Coercive diplomacy. There are four parts to coercive diplomacy: deterrence, compellence, offense and defense. Coercive diplomacy “is essentially a diplomatic strategy that relies on the threat of force rather than the use of force. If force must be used to strengthen diplomatic efforts at persuasion, it is employed in an exemplary manner, in the form of quite limited military action,

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to demonstrate resolution and willingness to escalate to high levels of military action if necessary." The Marine Corps expeditionary capabilities seem fit closely into this type of diplomacy.

<sup>85</sup> Steven P. Basilici and Jeremy Simmons, "Transformation: A Bold Case for Unconventional Warfare" (master's thesis, Naval Post Graduate School, 2004), 50.

<sup>86</sup> Basilici and Simmons, 50.

<sup>87</sup> Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, *Amphibious Operations in 21<sup>st</sup> Century*, Washington, DC: Headquarters U.S. Marine Corps, 18 March 2009, 16

<sup>88</sup> Headquarters, United States Marine Corps, Marine Corps Common Task List (MCTL) 2.0, Quantico, Va, 1 December 2012.

<sup>89</sup> ACWG, 15.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid, 16.

<sup>91</sup> EGR CBA ICD, 15-20

<sup>92</sup> Ibid, 15-20

<sup>93</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-0 Joint Operations*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, V-46.

<sup>94</sup> U.S. Department of Defense, *Joint Publication 3-02, Amphibious Operations*, Washington, D.C.: U.S. Department of Defense, 2011, II-8.

<sup>95</sup> MCWP 3-33.5, 2-1.

<sup>96</sup> CJCS, 2001

<sup>97</sup> Phone interview with senior staff officers at I MEF, 6 March 2013.

<sup>98</sup> EW12, 12-22.

<sup>99</sup> EGR CBA ICD, 20-25

<sup>100</sup> Maj Eric Thompson, "MarSOC (Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command): It's about the future" *Marine Corps Gazette*; vol 95 no 10; Oct 2011; p61-63

<sup>101</sup> Interview with LTG Frank Helmick, XVIII Airborne Corps Commander during the 2011 US Army Reconnaissance Symposium. He commented that his AFO forces – Battlefield Surveillance Brigades (BSfB) were reliant on SOF to gain access into the operating environment. He expressed a desire to "reinvent" the Long Range Surveillance Company as a SOF-like AFO force.

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